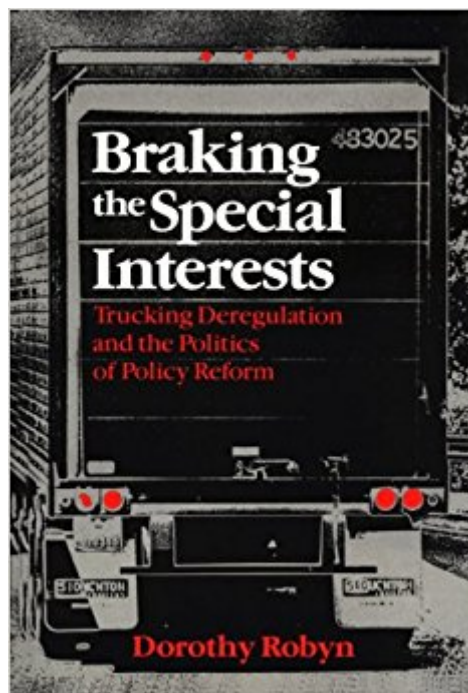




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Braking The Special Interests: Trucking Deregulation And The Politics Of Policy Reform



Synopsis

In 1980 Congress voted to eliminate the federal system of protective regulation over the powerful trucking industry, despite fierce opposition. This upset marked a rare example in American politics of diffuse public interests winning out over powerful economic lobbies. In *Braking the Special Interests* Dorothy Robyn draws upon firsthand observations of formal proceedings and behind-the-scenes maneuverings to illuminate the role of political strategy in the landmark trucking battle. Robyn focuses her analysis on four elements of strategy responsible for the deregulator's victory—elements that are essential, she argues, to any successful policy battle against entrenched special interests: the effective use of economic data and analysis to make a strong case for the merits of reform; the formation and management of a diverse lobbying coalition of firms and interest groups; presidential bargaining to gain political leverage; and transition schemes to reduce uncertainty and cushion the blow to losers. Drawing on political and economic theory, *Braking the Special Interests* is an immensely rich and readable study of political strategy and skill, with general insights relevant to current political battles surrounding trade, agriculture, and tax policies. Robyn's interdisciplinary work will be of great value to scholars and practitioners of politics, economics, and public policy.

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Customer Reviews

Dorothy Robyn is assistant professor of public policy at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

First a disclaimer: I knew Dr. Robyn ("Dottie" at the time) back around 1979--when the entire "trucking deregulation" debate was going on. And she was kind enough to even acknowledge me in the Preface to the book. The heart of the book--for me at least--is the chapter "The Elements of Political Strategy." It's Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" applied to the battle over policy, politics, and ideas. Being in the trenches at the time--and often being "shot at" by others who were supposedly on the same side I was representing--I find it interesting to see the broader picture at some distance. But it is also fascinating to see the disconnect between facts, on the one side, and political strategy, on the other. I was employed by the pro-regulation forces and it was interesting, albeit painful, to see logical and rational arguments overwhelmed by emotion and simple slogans. Not to say that the deregulators didn't have some valid points. They did. But that's not the way the battle was fought. The pro-regulation forces just could never understand that quick slogans and oversimplified analogies would be far more powerful than thick binders of economic analysis and economists recalling the bad old days of the 1930s. And one sees this same mistake being repeated over and over through the decades. Sharp, pointed attacks, with a David-and-Goliath approach, have frequently overcome the perceived entrenched old-line powers. Just take a look at today's politics for a refresher course. Dottie--umm, Dr. Robyn--does a great job of analyzing this use of political strategy as it was employed in the fight to pass the Motor Carrier Act of 1980.

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